

MISCELLANEOUS

SOCIAL SERVICE IN A CHANGING WORLD ITS RÔLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Tenth Social Service Conference was held in Rome from January 8-14, 1961, to consider the question of "Social service in a changing world, its rôle and responsibilities". It proposed to study the rôle assigned to social service in the world to-day and offered a possibility of exchanging views and experiences. Over 2,500 delegates from 51 countries on the 5 continents came in response to this invitation, and the two international institutions of the Red Cross also sent two representatives: the ICRC: Mr Courcier, and the League: Dr. Hantchef.

A large-scale international conference such as this has many aspects: prepared reports, study groups, committees of experts, visits to social welfare institutions, exhibition of social welfare work, films showings, meetings of specialized organisations, receptions to promote personal contacts. Intellectually, it is an enrichment and from a human point of view, an encouragement; it sets new problems for some participants and provides others with solutions.

The high standard of the speakers, the numerous and varied attendance and the attractive setting all contributed to make the Rome Congress a success, which was however in the main due to the amount of work carried out by the Italian Social Service Committee. The vast and luxurious rooms of the Conference Building in the World Exhibition quarter on the outskirts of the city had been chosen to receive this large cosmopolitan gathering, among which there were more shimmering saris to be seen than at previous conferences, and, for the first time, several African delegates in their turbans and flowing robes.

We do not intend in this short article to give a detailed report of such a fruitful and diversified conference; we shall only attempt to draw a general outline. The I.S.S.C. did not formulate recom-

mendations, neither did it make decisions; it was a large-scale forum in which each participant was free to seek the solutions to his own problems.

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Social service is undergoing continual change, since the needs it is called to fill go hand in hand with the changes taking place in the world. This statement is truer to-day than ever before and was reflected in the Rome Conference. Scientific progress, technical progress, revolutionary changes in demographic conditions due to the progress of medicine which has secured for every second person to-day a life expectancy of over 70 years, the migration of workers, emigration: the contacts between individuals are multiplied in every way and yet they are becoming ever more unstable and, contrary to common belief, man is more isolated than ever. He is asked to make an ever greater effort to adapt himself to his surroundings.

The consequences of this state of affairs have been admirably analyzed by the French doctor and psychiatrist, Dr. P. Sivadon. We are only aware of an infinitesimal part of the world in which we live, he said,—of a world which is not given to us, but is built by each one of us and which is, therefore, above all, subjective; it only becomes objective to the extent in which we can see it through another's eyes. It is precisely one of the tasks of the social services to establish a form of communication between different worlds, and thus facilitate genuine contacts between individuals. At birth, a child is socially speaking premature, and he is marked for the rest of his life by the social "mould" which surrounds him: a family in straitened circumstances or possibly hostile social groups do not provide him with the protection necessary to make him a completely balanced being. Man needs security to live, not merely the material and anonymous type of security which comes from inner peace of mind in a society where he is accepted. Dr. Sivadon closed with these words: "A civilization can be judged by the struggle it offers against fear".

Faced as we are nowadays, thanks to science, with notions of the infinitely small and infinitely great, man loses sight of his own reality: there is a dislocation between the reality and the

image of the reality. This is where Social Service has to step in : to help the individual to readapt himself to his reality and to his changing surroundings, for his own cultural and psychological development have not been able to keep pace with that of technical progress. This was pointed out by Professor G. Petrilli, Rome, who added that technical progress is worth nothing if it does not run parallel to spiritual progress.

A further question which various speakers dwelt upon and which was also pointed out in the study groups is the rôle of those who benefit from social service. Nowadays, social service is intended for all categories of the population and it must allow them to play their part in drawing up as well as carrying out its programmes. There is a tendency towards encouraging co-operation between the social welfare workers and those they are helping : the latter explain their needs, offer their services and join together in groups, organizing themselves and ensuring representation within the social welfare bodies.

The Social Service must therefore acquaint them more fully with its methods, giving up all work of a " guardian " character and thus persuading them that by asking its assistance they are not losing but winning their freedom. By thus widening its field of action, it will recruit new helpers. In addition, it is interesting to note that at a time when social service is becoming a recognized profession, there is an ever-growing need for voluntary helpers attracted by its ideals and methods. This means, however, that we must revise our ideas on basic education which should awaken each citizen to a sense of his responsibilities towards the community and thus develop a social conscience.

The Social Service is called upon to widen the scope of its activities by contributing to the development of communities, social research, administration and social policy ; it must act as an intermediary to coordinate the various teams at work.

Its workers therefore have to assume ever-increasing responsibilities and their training thus becomes of foremost importance. The International Association of Social Service Colleges, which held its Congress immediately prior to the Conference, called upon its members to reconsider the question of the fundamental training they offer their students and to adapt it to the needs these will have

to fill. An understanding of the nature of a problem is more important than describing the way in which it should be solved. As yet, the colleges have not paid sufficient attention to providing fully trained social welfare staff; it is imperative that they do so.

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In order to give an idea of the multitude of problems brought up during the conference, we shall only list the subjects dealt with by the study groups :

- *Co-operation between social welfare workers and public health officials*
- *Mental health*
- *Rôle of social welfare in the services for the disabled*
- *Young people's needs (outside institutions)*
- *Juvenile delinquency*
- *Social welfare for children removed from their families*
- *Protection of women at work, help for the aged*
- *Assistance to emigrants and refugees*
- *Social welfare in industry*
- *Social welfare in the country*
- *Social welfare and housing*
- *Denominational social services*
- *Rôle of social services in developing communities*
- *Rôle of social welfare workers in social policy*
- *Finally, under the auspices of the FAO, the question of food resources.*

This impressive list bears witness to the manifold aspects of social welfare services, but also shows how necessary it is to co-ordinate all their efforts in order to obtain a satisfactory degree of well-being for all.

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As we have seen, the essential points stressed by the reports presented during the conference were : team-work, co-operation with those benefiting from the social welfare service and the need to study the type of training that social workers should receive.

Indeed, these are not revolutionary ideas and previous conferences have already mentioned them. But it is interesting to note that these are precisely the matters which are brought up again and again and which are now of prime importance. The social welfare worker must come to realize this more fully and fit his work into the social structure. He has gained entry and holds a recognized place in most countries; the nature of his responsibilities is no different to-day from what it was, but their range has become wider and deeper, thus making it indispensable to set up more definite ethical rules. This has been understood by the International Federation of Social Welfare Workers, who put the question on the agenda of the meeting it held during the Conference.

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The Social Service Conference was instituted in 1928 by Dr. René Sand, so well remembered by all who had the honour of knowing this remarkable personality. A "René Sand Prize" was created in his memory to be conferred upon a social worker of outstanding merit. After Professor Parisod, Paris, and Mr. G. Haynes, London, this prize was awarded in an official ceremony to Princess Amrit Kaur, former Minister of Health of India and now President of the Indian Red Cross Society, who was secretary to Gandhi; in reply she made a remarkable speech on the idea of social service in relation to the needs and problems in the world, particularly in Asia and Africa.

The I.S.S.C. has been presided over for the last four years by Mr. George F. Davidson, Canada; the Standing Committee expressed its regret in accepting his resignation and appointed Mr. Lester B. Granger, United States, previously one of the Vice Chairmen, to succeed him.

The next Conference will be held in Rio de Janeiro in the summer of 1962 with the theme: "The contribution of social service in developing newly created communities".

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